

# THE EFFECT OF INTEGRATING MOOC'S ON SAUDI FEMALE STUDENTS' LISTENING ACHIEVEMENT

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on developing listening skills among Saudi EFL university students. To achieve this purpose, a listening was prepared and administered. Then, a MOOC was designed, programmed, and presented to the students to develop their listening skills. The sample of the research included forty level-one, English major students. They were randomly selected to be included in the experimental group (N=20) and the control group (N=20). Findings of the research revealed that the MOOC has been effective in the development of specific listening skills. The findings also revealed statistically significant differences between the post-test mean scores in all listening skills, namely, intensive, selective, and extensive which were in favor of the experimental group.

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**Keywords:** Saudi MOOCs, Listening, Deschooling, Connectivism

## Introduction

Foreign language teaching in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has received considerable efforts. Teaching as a profession involves a considerable amount of challenges and decision-making. Therefore, the roles of the EFL teachers need to be as self-regulated learners in order to examine their practice and document their mission for self-development and articulation through the use of modern technology. There is a need to attempt demystifying the common misconceptions associated with online-teaching to enable teachers to grow professionally (Aljmal, 2012).

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are one of the advanced technologies in the field of education. MOOCs aim at involving a large-scale

of participants through open access via the web. The philosophy of MOOCs is derived from connectivism which emphasizes the deschooling philosophy of education. According to Kop and Hill, connectivism gives importance to two skills that contribute to learning, which are nothing but, "ability to seek out current information and the ability to filter secondary and extraneous information" (Kop and Hill, 2008, p. 2). The students of English as a foreign language (EFL) encounter a lot of barriers in acquiring the language, that is why there is a high demand for university students to study abroad to develop their English proficiency. Not to mention that many specialists in teaching agreed on the importance of transitioning the teaching process to an online teaching and the role of the teachers in it. The transition to teaching online can pose a variety of barriers for instructors who have to be aware of that online education requires the instructor to make a pedagogical shift away from the notion of being the source of knowledge and towards the idea of being more of a facilitator, or a mentor (Ally, 2009; Fish & Gill, 2009; Salmon, 2005).

With the inventions of new online learning technologies, any student has opportunities to be taught by the native speakers by enrolling in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). MOOCs are offered for free and any student could participate in them. Perhaps it is a great chance for English learners, but to the best of the researchers' knowledge, MOOCs have not been studied extensively in the context of teaching language in regard to how these materials can be used to enhance students' English proficiency .

### **Statement of the Problem**

The affection of MOOCs is still under-research to investigate if the students learn as much as they would in a traditional classroom setting. Based on the researchers' experience in, MOOCs can be useful if integrated in English language courses. With regard to the willingness of the teachers in reflective teaching, the researchers have conducted this quasi-experimental study to investigate and evaluate the integration of MOOCs in English listening courses. Thereby, from the researchers' experience as a participant in MOOCs as well as an EFL instructor, there are many misconceptions associated with the integration of new technologies. That is why Saudi EFL teachers' awareness of MOOCs needs to be increased by conducting studies on Saudi EFL students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The present study aimed at investigating the potentiality of integrating MOOCs on Saudi EFL female students' listening courses, and to illustrate whether MOOCs can provide an effective and a motivating way of enhancing the learners' listening comprehension.

## **Research Question**

The present study attempted to answer the following research question:

Are there statistically significant differences in the students' achievement in listening between the experimental group (who have been taught by employing a MOOC) and the control group (who have been taught conventionally) that can be attributed to using MOOCs?

## **Significance of the Study**

The current study may help teachers and educators to understand the potentiality of integrating MOOCs on Saudi EFL female students' listening courses and to illustrate whether MOOCs can provide an effective and motivating way of enhancing the learners' listening comprehension by allowing them to select the most relevant materials to their language learning needs.

## **Definition of Terms**

**MOOCs** are one of the advanced technologies in the field of education. It stands for Massive Open Online Courses. MOOCs aim at involving a large-scale of participants through open access via the web. MOOCs are offered for free and any student could participate in them. Viswanathan (2012) defined the uniqueness in MOOCs as: "it enables participants to connect outside the traditional learning environment, thereby offering autonomy, openness and emergent knowledge." P.32

**Connectivism** is a theory of learning for the digital age that is pioneered and still being developed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes (two Canadian educational technologists). There are two important principles in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) which derived their justification from this theory. They are: engage learners in global language learning education opportunities through Web 2 tools and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), and develop learners' autonomy through collaborative social networking (Cameron, 1989).

**De-schooling Philosophy** is a term coined by Ivan Illich in his book *Deschooling Society* (1971), in which he argues that schooling and education are by no means necessarily synonymous. He suggests that the function of schools is as much about social control as it is about learning; and that most of what is valuable in our learning takes place outside such institutions. He further argues that schools are not only an inefficient means of providing education in that they generate excessive bureaucracy and expense, but that they are also socially divisive (Oxford Dictionary, 2008).

## **Literature Review**

### **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)**

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are one of the advanced technologies in the field of education. The term Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) was first introduced in 2008 by Dave Cormier to describe Siemens and Downes' (as cited in Herman, 2012) "Connectivism and Connective Knowledge" course. Oxford Online Dictionaries (n. d.) define a MOOC as a course of study made available over the internet without charge to a very large number of people. MOOCs typically differ from "regular" online courses in that: (a) those participating are not registered students at the school. (b) they are designed for unlimited participation and open access via the web – no tuition is charged. (c) there is typically no credit given for completion of the MOOC (Allen & Seaman, 2014).

According to Lane (2012), there are different kinds of MOOCs: (1) network-based, (2) task-based, and (3) content-based. Downes (2010) has reduced this distinction to Extended Massive Open Online Courses (xMOOCs) which is content-based, and Connectivist or Classic Massive Open Online Courses (cMOOCs) which is connectivist or network-based (Steele, 2013). The former involving knowledge transmission and perhaps a quiz at the end, it is widely seen as replicating old-fashioned lectures and exams. In contrast, the latter empowers the learner to discuss, debate, discover, share and co-create new knowledge with his or her fellow learners. Siemens (2012) describes them; cMOOCs focus on knowledge creation and generation whereas xMOOCs focus on knowledge duplication. Downes (2010) pinpoints that MOOCs are a society where knowledge and learning are public goods, freely created and shared, not hoarded or withheld in order to extract wealth or influence.

One of the basic features of MOOCs is that "it enables participants to connect outside the traditional learning environment, thereby offering autonomy, openness and emergent knowledge" (Viswanathan, 2012, p. 1). That is to say MOOCs enable learners to discover and apply underlying structure to their perspective on a course according to their own experience and notions of learning. Thus, the successful learners utilize the internet to find their learning goals, MOOCs work as a provider for the learners with the suitable materials to reach their goals. Bloom's digital taxonomy which attempts to account for the new behaviors and actions emerging as technology advances regarded MOOCs to be applying one's own schemata, reaching the higher echelons of Bloom's taxonomy not with training how to do particular things, but in working through approaches that would enable learners to learn heuristics that might be appropriate to their future contexts (Stevens, 2013). That is to reach "creating taxonomy" which involves designing, constructing, planning, producing, inventing, devising and making

(Churches, 2007). This is the goal of each language learning or teaching program. The learner has to be in the level of producing and practicing the target language.

MOOCs provide a new learning landscape which can complement the current teaching without harming education (Krause & Lowe, 2014). That is to say, MOOCs appear to be merely doing the familiar teaching associated with face to face learning. On average, students in online learning conditions performed modestly better than those receiving face to face instruction (National Education Technology Plan, 2010). Moreover, MOOCs have been considered the most significant educational innovation in 2012 (Khan, 2012). They are getting improved day by day and the need for research in MOOCs is raised rapidly as the number of MOOCs are increasing. These improvements in MOOCs will shape the future structure of traditional universities. The implementation of MOOCs in a right way will increase the quality of teaching at universities and colleges.

### **Previous Studies Related to Using MOOCs in Language Teaching**

MOOCs are one of the appropriate educational technologies for languages teaching and learning specifically English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). It affords an opportunity for any learner to learn or develop their language levels for free by professional instructors with an appropriate content for their levels. Cormier (as cited in Hargadon, 2012) justifies why MOOCs might work particularly well for language learning. Cormier argues that MOOCs are especially suited to complex and chaotic subjects, which language learning tends to be. In some theories of language learning such as Long's interaction hypothesis and Krashen's input hypothesis, language acquisition is strongly facilitated by the use of the target language in interaction and through providing one another with linguistic data that they would be constantly processing (Nizegorodcew, 2007).

Collin (2006) illustrated the potentiality of MOOCs in language learning. According to the cognitive apprenticeship model, there are four major roles in the process of cognitive apprenticeship: modeling, mentoring, coaching and scaffolding. The core notion of apprenticeship is the notion of a more experienced person assisting less experienced ones by giving them structure and examples to achieve the goal. The learning starts from legitimate peripheral participation where a new learner gradually proceeds toward full participation. As the learner progresses, the teacher gradually withdraws from the process. This learning process may be applied to EFL learning using MOOCs. Using this approach, students will be able to prepare themselves for studying abroad, which is the final stage of this model.

Few studies have examined the MOOCs and the integration of MOOCs in language teaching. For instance, Fini (2009) analyzed the impact of MOOC on Connectivism and Connective Knowledge course (CCK08) users. The framework focused on three perspectives, including: (a) lifelong learning in relation to open education, with a focus on the effective use of learning tools; (b) the more recent personal knowledge management (PKM) skills approach; and (c) the usability of web-based learning tools. The open source survey that was conducted aimed at finding out the participants' level of proficiency in English, level of technological skills, their opinion about certification, toolset used in the course, frequency of use and their relevance. The results showed that the participants had taken the course based on the learning styles, personal objectives and time availability. They had selected the tools depending upon their needs, purposes and self-organizational skills. The participants highly supported the idea of integrating technology with learning. However, the respondents were apprehensive of the feasibility of integrating tools while teaching students at all levels. Their responses on the whole raised an important aspect of teachers' interest towards offering an online course to their students.

Anzai (2013) examined the potentiality of language instruction by integrating MOOCs. The purpose of her study was to explore the potentiality of using a MOOC in English language education as supplementary material in formal education in Japan. She conducted pre and post surveys, the purpose of the pre survey was to find out how the students felt about online distance learning using a MOOC, and what kinds of support they expected from the instructor while the purpose of the post survey was to find how the students perceived their learning integrating with a MOOC. The results showed that the students had positive expectations toward the EFL instruction with a MOOC, and EFL instruction was what they had expected. As a result, the study showed how MOOCs can be a good educational resource for teaching and learning English.

Lachheb (2013) investigated the efficacy of MOOCs on English language Tunisian college students' attitudes and perceptions, motivation, interest, and its effect on their academic performance. Participants were asked to fill in pre and post survey of their attitudes towards information technology. One randomly selected group was taught a lesson where the instructor used a MOOC. Another group was taught by the same instructor traditionally. The findings of this study provide a good depiction of the situation of the MOOC presence in some higher education institutions. Clearly, MOOC had a great effect on students' motivation and interest in the subject. As the non-technology group reported significantly lower motivational level, thus lower attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction toward the instructional materials being used; the technology

group were more motivated toward the materials and the lesson. The findings support the research in regard with the necessity of integrating MOOCs in education.

Bruff, et al. (2013) examined the students' perceptions of blended learning by integrating a MOOC into a graduate course of machine learning at Vanderbilt University during the Fall 2012 semester. The blended course design, which leveraged a MOOC course and platform for lecturing, grading, and discussion, enabled the instructor to lead an overload course in a topic much desired by students. The study showed that the students' response to the MOOC was enthusiastic. They described the professors' lecture videos as designed effectively, presented clearly, and informative; they described the MOOC as generally useful for self-paced learning.

Kolowich and Newman (2013) surveyed 103 faculty teaching MOOCs on Coursera and produced interesting results. Even though 79% of the respondents think MOOCs are worth the hype, only 48% consider their MOOC as academically rigorous as the classroom version, and only 28% think students should receive institutional credit for completing their MOOC.

Mackness, et al. (2013) investigated the pedagogy in Oxford Brookes University's 'First Steps in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education' MOOC. It was a small course (200 participants registered from 24 countries) which was focused on introducing higher education teaching skills, and, uniquely, to deliberately integrate open academic practice as a vital part of professional development for higher education teachers. A qualitative, case-study approach was used in the research, based on surveys, interviews, and social media, to provide evidence about how people learned in this course and consider wider implications for teaching and learning in higher education. The evidence showed that participants who completed the course were able to learn autonomously and navigate the distributed platforms and environments. The research showed that small task-oriented MOOCs can effectively support professional development of open academic practice.

Allen and Seaman (2014) reported that the percent of higher education institutions among over 2,800 colleges and universities that currently have a MOOC increased from 2.6 percent in 2012 to 5.0 percent in 2014. If nearly 25% of colleges surveyed have MOOCs on the drawing boards, this seems to be a significant inroad for this model of learning. Their two most recent reports showed steady and increasing growth, and since 2002, the percentage of institutions that consider online education as critical to their long-term strategy has steadily increased to over 65% at all types of institutions, but with public universities leading the trend.

Related literature suggests that using MOOC for teaching listening skills allows the possibility of numerous positive outcomes. By working independently, learners are likely to become more aware of their personal

learning styles and thereby discover how best they can perfect their own listening skills and promote their own language learning. However, very few studies investigated the use of MOOCs and its effect on the language learners' proficiency. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there was no focus on the effect of MOOCs on language learners' listening comprehension. This study aimed at investigating the potentiality of integrating MOOCs on Saudi EFL female students' listening courses and to illustrate how MOOCs can provide a very effective and highly motivating way of enhancing the learners' listening comprehension by allowing them to select the materials that are most relevant to their language learning needs.

## **Methods and Procedures**

### **Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of two groups of listening course students: the experimental group and the control group. The students attended English major courses and all of them were at level one studying English language skills courses for up to 10 hours per week. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 23 and they had studied English for at least six years before the experiment. None of the 40 participants had any experience in MOOCs before implementing this study. The experimental group composed of 20 students who were taught by using a MOOC created by the researchers employing native speakers' materials (podcasts, videos, graphic novels and readings) within 3 hours a week for 4 weeks (see appendix A); whereas the control group composed of the same number of students, who were given no special treatment. They followed the book along with its CD and the teacher's guidelines, and were taught the same material, the same number of hours by the same teacher.

### **Instrument of the Study**

For the purpose of collecting the data, the researchers designed a listening test to determine the students' level in the target language. The test consisted of 18 items divided into three parts each of which was about one listening skill; intensive, selective or extensive. It was based on Micro and Macro listening skills (Brown, 2010). The students were asked to choose the correct answer on the first and third questions and were asked to fill the gaps on the second question. The test served as a treatment measure to compare results of pretest and post-test between the two groups, and within the experimental group, to provide evidence of the effect of the experiment. The pretest was conducted before the study on both groups on the first week of Spring semester 2014, and was compared later to the post-test. The post-test was conducted at the end of the study on the sixth week. Post-test results stood as a measurement to show the differences in results, if any.



### **Validity, Difficulty, Reliability, and Discrimination of the Research Instrument**

To check the stability of the research instrument, the researchers conducted a pilot study. It composed of 20 students from the same level, studying with the same teacher as the other groups. They were taught the course in a traditional teaching method following the book guidelines along with its CD. The researchers examined the students with the pre and post-tests that are used for the study on the first and sixth week. The test consisted of 18 items and was scored out of 18.

The difficulty coefficient of the test items showed that the difficulty of the items ranged between (0.25 – 0.73) which was considered acceptable since the average of the difficulty item should be between (0.15 – 0.85). If it is less than (0.15), it regards a very easy question. The discrimination coefficient showed that the items discrimination ranged between (0.34 – 0.72) which was considered acceptable since it was more than (0.30).


The reliability of the test was checked in two methods. Pearson Correlation method showed that the average reliability of the test items was (0.728), and the Cronbach's Alpha reliability method showed that the reliability of the test resulted (0.823), these two results were considered a good evidence of the internal reliability. Moreover, the research instrument was tested, validated and approved by many academic referees to establish its validity. The researchers followed and edited the test based on these validations. The researchers deleted one part of the test which was (the responsive listening skill) based on one of the referees' suggestion due to the resemblance with the other parts, and edited the number of the multiple choices from two to three.

### **Research Design**

The researchers employed the quasi-experimental design with pre and post-test for control and experimental groups to examine the students' listening level before and after the treatment. The participants were randomly selected. The pre-test was administered a week before the study. After that, the experimental group was enrolled in a 4 week MOOC program designed by the researchers through using many native speakers' materials; while the other group was taught in a traditional course following the course book with its CD. A week later, the post-test was given to all groups to evaluate their levels after the treatment. The experiment lasted six consecutive weeks according to the following schedule:

Table1. Timetable of the Study

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6
Treatment	-	Chapter1	Chapter2	Chapter3	Chapter4	-
Assessment	Pre-test	-	-	-	-	Post-test



The researchers' role during the study was a designer of the MOOCs and a facilitator of the course. She developed her own MOOCs and made them available for the participants. The researchers maintained student presence through the program to ensure a sustained communication among the participants.

### Course Design

The materials of the MOOC were designed based on Scope and Sequence Chart for listening and speaking communication skills (Brown, 2000). There were four chapters, each of which considered one of the daily life topics such as: meeting people, asking for specific information or ordering in a restaurant. There were six parts in each chapter, each of which was in regard with one part such as pronunciation, reductions or using language functions (see table 2). The activities in each part of each chapter were designed based on the Micro and Macro listening skills (Brown, 2010). The access to MOOC was self-enrolled and controlled by the researchers. Within three hours, each student could cover the whole chapter.

Table2, Course Design

Parts	Content
Part 1	Pre-listening Questions.
Part 2	Previewing Vocabulary.
Part 3	Distinguishing Stress
Part 4	Reductions: comparing reduced and unreduced pronunciation.
Part 5	Pronunciation: endings.
Part 6	Using Language Functions

### Data Analysis

The researchers corrected the tests based on the number of items, each item received one mark. Thus the total is 18 out of 18. The researchers used the constant comparison method. The researchers used the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) to get the results as below:

- Pearson Correlation to test the reliability of each item of the test by using test-retest method.

- Cronbach's Alpha to test the reliability of the whole test.
- Independent-Samples T-test to find the significance of differences between the experimental group and the control group.

## Results and Discussion

### Comparison Between the Control and the Experimental Groups on the Pre-test:

Before the experiment, the researchers administered the control and the experimental groups' pre-test to check that the two groups were at the same level. The researchers compared their mean scores on the pre-test. Table 3 shows the T-test for the differences between the experimental and control groups on the pretest.

Table3. T-values for the Mean Differences Between the Experimental and Control Groups Scores on the Pre-test.

Listening Tests	N	Experimental		Control		t	Df	Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Intensive	20	1.75	0.550	1.45	0.686	1.525	38	0.135
Selective	20	2.50	0.889	2.60	0.598	-0.418	38	0.679
Extensive	20	1.75	0.716	1.80	0.523	-0.252	38	0.802
Total	20	6.00	1.170	5.85	1.182	0.403	38	0.689

This table shows that there were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the pre-test, on any listening skill namely, intensive, selective, and extensive. This means that the two groups were at the same level at the beginning of the experiment. It can be noticed from this table that the mean scores of both groups are low. This result was expected since students in both experimental and control groups had no previous training on listening skills.

### Comparison Between the Experimental and Control Groups on the Post-test

The main question of this research was to find if there are statistically significant differences between the post-test mean scores of the experimental group and control group. To find that, the mean scores were statistically compared as shown in table 4 as follows:

Table4. T-values for the Mean Differences between the Experimental and Control Groups on the Post-test

Listening Tests	N	Experimental		Control		t	Df	Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Intensive	20	2.85	0.366	2.20	0.834	3.193	38	0.003
Selective	20	6.65	1.981	3.65	0.671	6.415	38	0.000
Extensive	20	3.20	0.696	2.75	0.444	2.438	38	0.020
Total	20	12.70	2.003	8.60	1.314	7.655	38	0.000

This table shows that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores on the post-test of both experimental and control groups on listening skills; namely, intensive, selective, and extensive. These differences were in favor of the experimental group. This indicates the effectiveness of MOOC in developing listening skills. This proves the validity of MOOC integration on Saudi EFL female students' listening achievement.

## Discussion

The above results answered the question of the research which is: "Are there statistically significant differences in the students' achievement in listening between the experimental group (who will be taught by employing MOOC) and the control group (who will be taught conventionally) that can be attributed to using MOOC?" The mean ratings of the post-test of the experimental group were higher than those of the control group. The post-test results indicated differences in each part of the test between the experimental and the control groups (see above table 3 and 4); which means that the experimental group performed better after the experiment which had a positive effect on their listening comprehension levels.

This proves that the experimental group students performed better with MOOC integration that enhanced their listening comprehension levels. Thus, the findings suggest that MOOCs can enhance students' listening comprehension better than traditional classroom instruction. These results are in agreement with other studies, which found significant differences in the students' performance when students were taught using CALL tools (Collin 2006, Fini 2009, Anzai 2013, Lachheb 2013, Bruff, et al. 2013, Kolowich & Newman 2013, Mackness, and Allen and Seaman 2014) for listening comprehension and teaching language.

It can be noticed that the use of MOOC developed the learner's skills by raising their awareness of the differences between written and spoken language in the MOOC parts. Using MOOC has also highlighted the differences between reduced and unreduced pronunciation such as (I'll see

you guys soon and I'll see ya guys soon), and the endings pronunciation such as the differences between (/iz/, /s/, and /z/) in –s ending pronunciation, which enabled the student to comprehend the spoken language. So the MOOC was appropriate to the level of the subjects' comprehension. The students were listening to the language as it is naturally used in real situations. In other words, the teacher's responsibility was to raise students' awareness of the characteristics of spoken language.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The primary aim of this study was to determine whether MOOCs affect EFL Saudi students listening comprehension achievement. The findings revealed positive results which were in favor of the experimental group. The superiority of students' performance in the post-test measures is due to the effective use of MOOC and the variety of activities that have been used in it. Thus, this study supports the notion that the integration of MOOCs can make a positive and significant difference to the listening comprehension for EFL higher education students.

### **Implications of the Study**

The need to acknowledge the importance of integrating MOOCs stems from the need to improve the EFL learners' listening comprehension. It promotes their need to monitor their own improvement and take responsibility for their own language development. Several implications can help EFL learners improve their learning outcomes:

1. Encourage teachers to use MOOCs to develop the learners' listening skills more than the traditional tools of cassettes or CD's.
2. Train the teachers to learn how to integrate MOOC in their teaching.
3. Devote more time to computer courses for EFL students.
4. Adapt a new method for teaching listening means that; using the computer programs such as MOOC instead of the traditional methods.
5. Adopt individualization for teaching language skills.
6. Implement MOOCs integration in the delivery of pedagogy and become part of students' evaluation criteria.

### **Conclusion**

Integrating MOOCs in English language learning can be a promising way to enhance students' language proficiency. Currently, EFL students learn English through traditional materials as news media, literature and essays. But with integrating MOOCs, there will be a new way of English

teaching that enhances the students' proficiency. Since MOOCs provide the students with similar experiences as studying abroad, they may need support from an instructor to reduce their anxiety and stress. Living in this century, not only the institutions but each individual teacher and learner needs to understand more how we can take advantage of this wonderful opportunity for learning.

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